

LSC OUTCOMES COMMITTEE'S REPORT ON APPROACHES TO OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT

I. Introduction

The committee began with the assumption that an outcomes measure system can be developed and implemented that would provide LSC and its grantees with useful information. This memo and the appendices contain outcomes measures and tools developed by an LSC working group¹ (hereinafter “group” or “committee”) for presentation and discussion at the LSC Outcomes Summit II. The memo discusses an implementation process and describes six proposed outcomes measures and highlights the rationales and benefits of using them.² The appendices contain forms for four sets of measures.

The committee’s thinking was informed by the wide range of outcomes measure initiatives that legal services programs across the country are pursuing.³ Several of the proposed tools are adapted from those that many programs already use.

II. Testing and Implementation

The committee believes that any outcome measures decided upon should be tested and evaluated before they are implemented. Evaluation could proceed along three tracks:

1. A formal pilot test by selected volunteer field programs. LSC used this approach as part of the development and implementation process for both the State Planning Evaluation system and the Matters Service Report (MSR) system.
2. Voluntary implementation (and testing) by individual grantees.
3. Having grantees generate specified data that LSC reviews during a staff visit or requests from selected programs, on a case by case basis.

III. Outcomes Measures and Tools Examined and Considered

The committee recommends consideration of the following outcomes measures and tools. The committee sees these tools as complementary. Each generates data that are not captured by any of the others. In total they provide a much better understanding of programs’ work than any single measure alone. The outcomes measures include:

1. Quantitative outcomes measures for extended service cases.
2. Narrative outcomes information about extended service cases.

¹ Michael Genz and John Meyer were chairs of the group. Members included Pat Hanrahan, Deidre Hamlar, Bristow Hardin, Joyce Raby, and Christopher Sundseth.

² The LSC working group benefited from a review of the reports and recommendations submitted by Summit II participants. We appreciate the opportunity to study these high quality working papers.

³ Some of these are discussed in the papers presented for the Outcomes Summit I and Outcomes Summit II. The IOLTA programs in Florida, Maryland, New York, Texas, and Virginia use outcomes measuring systems developed with assistance from Ken Smith and the Resource for Great Programs. Useful outcomes measure tools are also included in the comprehensive evaluation tools available from the Legal Aid Association of California.

3. Clients' assessments of the value and impact of programs' work.
4. Outcomes measures (more accurately "output" measures) for brief service cases.
5. "Snapshot" data⁴ regarding advice and brief services outcomes. In this approach, outcomes data would be obtained for a selected number of advice and brief service cases at some point (e.g., 30 days) after case closing.
6. "Snapshot" data about the range and type of issues confronting members of the client community. In this approach, information would be obtained concerning the legal related problems facing all (or a sample of) clients who contacted the office during a particular period (e.g., day, week).

Of the six considered, the group felt positively about the first three. Support for the last three was less strong.

The group considered measures and tools for four specific substantive areas: domestic violence, landlord-tenant, SSI, and support (with no domestic violence involved). The measures we propose could be adapted for all LSC subject matter areas.

A. Quantitative Outcomes Measures for Extended Services on Domestic Violence, Landlord-Tenant, SSI and Support Issues

The outcomes measure tables in Appendix A identify "the major benefits from direct representation of individuals" calculated at the time the case is closed. These were developed by IOLTA programs in several states with the assistance of Ken Smith and the Resource for Great Programs. Nearly all case management systems used by grantees should have the capacity to enable advocates to easily enter the data at case closing, and to enable programs to generate reports. Programs already must compile data re: case closings for LSC for CSRs. These outcomes measures would ask grantees to also compile data on the number of individuals helped and the amount of dollar benefits generated. Many programs already compile these or similar data for other funding sources (e.g., IOLTA, United Way).

B. Narratives Providing Outcomes Information for Extended Services on Domestic Violence, Landlord-Tenant, SSI and Support Issues

Qualitative outcomes data can provide another useful perspective on the work of grantees,⁵ thus complementing the statistical data discussed above. Since quantitative and qualitative outcomes data provide insights into different facets of programs' work, together they provide a fuller picture of the impact of this work than does either type of

⁴ The snapshot method gathers data about advices and brief service cases by obtaining information about case outcomes at some point after the case has been closed. This approach is based in part on the work of the Muskie Institute (University of Maine) which, in turn, borrows from an initiative used by domestic violence advocates in the United Kingdom.

⁵ Domestic Violence Initiatives at the Institute for Child and Family Policy at the Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine (Muskie Institute) staff reported that in focus groups on outcomes measurement VAWA grantees wanted the opportunity to talk about their work on a client's behalf, and not just submit statistical profiles because "with domestic violence cases (as well as others) it is sometimes hard to define 'success.' And numbers don't always reveal a high quality outcome."

data alone. By allowing grantees the option of providing qualitative data about the impacts of grantees' work, narrative information could provide important insights into program quality.⁶ Information that would complement the statistical data obtained in Appendix A could be solicited in the tabular format presented in Appendix B. Submitting these types of data could be optional.

C. Clients' Assessments of the Impact of Programs' Work

Most grantees use some type of client satisfaction surveys to obtain clients' feedback about their work. Many if not most surveys essentially focus on clients' assessments of how they were treated by the program. These data provide grantees with critical feedback about program operations, but they do not generate information from clients about a fundamental question: to what extent and how did the program's services affect you? Or, in somewhat different terms: what impact did the program's services have on you?

The committee suggests specific questions such as the following:⁷

1. To what extent did our services help you? (Choices: "A lot," "Some," "Not at all") This provides one measure of clients' assessments of the value of the services they received, i.e., the extent to which the program helped the client resolve a specific issue.
2. Did we help increase your knowledge about: (a) your legal rights and responsibilities, or (b) the ways that legal procedures affect you? This question is especially significant for advice and brief service cases.
3. Did our services: (a) help make your family's situation more stable (such as by resolving custody, securing support or obtaining a divorce), (b) protect you from an abuser, (c) keep you in your home or help you get other housing, (d) get you public benefits, or (e) other ways, (please explain).
4. How important to you were the results identified above? (Choices: "Very," "Somewhat," "Not at all") This provides another measure of clients' assessments of the value of the services they received, i.e., how important were the case results.

Information from clients about these issues can be obtained through several means:

1. Asking questions about these issues at the closing of extended services cases.
2. Adding specific questions to existing client satisfaction questionnaires or surveys.
3. Periodic surveys of a sample of clients receiving program services.
4. Focus groups.

⁶ See Bruce Iwasaki: "2009" A Look Back at Outcome Measures," pp.4-6. Qualitative outcomes information can "be used not only to measure, but to achieve advocacy goals."

⁷ We drew on many sources for this, including documents prepared for the upcoming Outcomes Summit: Deb House, "Legal Aid Of East Tennessee Proposed Outcome," Gary Dart, "Developing an Outcome Measurement System for a Merged Program," and Karen Widder, "Their Ways Are Not So United." But see Widder, pages 5-6.

D. Quantitative Outcomes Measures for Advice and Brief Services on Domestic Violence, Landlord-Tenant, SSI and Support Issues.

The committee was uncertain about whether we were to limit our explorations to extended service cases. In the course of our discussions we decided to address advice and brief service cases, especially because several states have relatively few or no extended services cases in the substantive areas on which the proposed system focuses.

Addressing true outcomes is a very complex process. This proposal is to follow the model in use by IOLTA programs. The outcomes measure table at Appendix D is drawn from those developed by IOLTA programs in several states with the assistance of Resource for Great Programs. The data in the table are more accurately termed “outputs,” which measure services provided by programs, than “outcomes,” which indicate the actual benefits provided to or impacts on clients. Short of conducting follow-up interviews with a sample of clients, however, these output data constitute the only quantitative measures of the advice and brief services programs provide their client population.

The difference between outputs and outcomes highlight the significant inherent limitations of the data captured in the table in Appendix D below. Most importantly, these data reveal only that the program provided a particular service. They cannot show if or how this service provided clients with any benefits. They cannot reveal whether clients understood the advice they obtained, whether they acted on this advice, or the results they obtained if they did follow the advice they received. The findings of Hotlines Outcomes Assessment Study reveal that these are important gaps, because they are the most important indicators of the value and benefits of advice and other brief services.

Committee members had varying views about the costs and benefits of programs generating data about the number of persons affected by advice and brief service cases. While most members thought this data should be captured (IOLTA programs request it), another view was that this would impose too great a burden on programs.

E. Snapshot Information about the Impact of Advice and Other Brief Services

This “snapshot” method provides a strategy for generating data about the outcomes of advices and brief service cases by obtaining information about case outcomes at some point after the case has been closed.⁸

In this approach,

⁸ “A Snapshot of the Impact of Domestic Violence in the UK,” Elizabeth A. Stanko, Director, Economic and Social Research Council’s Programme on Violence, Royal Holloway, University of London, https://www.domesticviolencedata.org/5_research/count/count.htm. On September 28, 2000, a number of key service providers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland counted how many times they came in contact with domestic violence survivors. The purpose of the count was to give a snapshot of the impact of domestic violence on the UK.

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1. A program would construct a sample of clients who received advice and brief services in cases in particular substantive legal areas (e.g., the four areas in this proposed framework) that were closed in a particular period (e.g., day, week). To assure that the sample is large enough, a program may need to select cases from a longer period.
2. At some point after the case was closed, the program (staff, volunteers or contractors) would contact the clients and conduct interviews that focused on issues such as whether the clients understood the advice they obtained, whether they acted on this advice, the results they obtained if they did follow the advice they received.

Although this approach could yield valuable information for program assessment and improvement, the methodological challenges and financial costs required to implement it could be considerable.

F. Snapshot Information about the Range and Type of Issues Affecting the Client Community

This approach focuses on the issues confronting members of the client community. This might also be a one day or one week snapshot. It would provide valuable insights into the range of issues affecting members of a particular program's client community. This information would be especially useful for needs assessments and surveying community needs. To be most beneficial, case workers would need to ensure they obtained information not merely about the specific "legal issue" that prompted the client's contact with the program but the full range of issues then confronting the client, whether or not the issues were subject to legal remedies.

The committee recognizes that this would not generate "outcomes" data per se. We present it because of the other benefits it can provide. The committee does not present a proposed tool.

Appendix A Quantitative Outcomes Measures for Extended Services on Domestic Violence, Landlord-Tenant, SSI and Support Issues

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: Cases Closed and Persons Benefiting

| CASE TYPE | # Of Cases Closed | # Of Persons Directly Affected |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Obtained protective order from domestic violence | | |
| Obtained protective order, custody and support (child and/or spousal) in a case involving domestic violence | | |
| Obtained protection from elder abuse or neglect | | |
| Obtained assistance with safety planning | | |
| Obtained divorce in a case involving domestic violence | | |
| Obtained a divorce with protective order in a case involving domestic violence | | |
| Obtained a divorce with protective order, including custody and support (child and/or spousal) and appropriate terms of | | |

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| | | |
|--|--|--|
| possession in a case involving domestic violence | | |
| Obtained a divorce, including custody and support (child and/or spousal) and appropriate terms of possession in a case involving domestic violence | | |
| Total | | |

DIRECT DOLLAR BENEFITS TO CLIENTS FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES

| CASE TYPE | Lump Sum / Back Benefits | Monthly Benefits |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Child support order | | |
| Spousal support order | | |
| Total | | |

SSI: CASES CLOSED AND PERSONS BENEFITING

| CASE TYPE | # of Cases | # of Persons Directly Affected |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Obtained SSI benefit / right | | |
| Preserved SSI benefit / right | | |
| Increased SSI benefit / right | | |
| Total | | |

DIRECT DOLLAR BENEFITS TO CLIENTS FROM SSI CASES

| CASE TYPE | Lump Sum / Back Benefits | Monthly Benefits |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| NOTE (1): Can list all above items separately or provide a single total | | |
| Note (2): List separately the “affirmative” benefits (new or preserved benefits) and the “preventive” benefits (savings from blocking judgments). Affirmative benefits can be estimated with greater certainty than preventive benefits. | | |

LANDLORD / TENANT: Cases Closed and Persons Benefiting

| CASE TYPE | # Of Cases Closed | # Of Persons Directly Affected |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| Prevented eviction from public housing | | |
| Prevented eviction from subsidized housing | | |
| Prevented eviction from other housing | | |
| Delayed eviction providing time to seek other housing | | |
| Prevented denial of public or subsidized housing tenant’s rights | | |
| Avoided, or obtained redress for, illegal or unfair claims / charges by landlord | | |
| Overcame denial of tenant’s rights under lease | | |
| Enforced rights to decent, habitable housing | | |
| Obtained repairs to dwelling | | |
| Obtained return of security deposit | | |
| Obtained access to public housing | | |
| Obtained access to subsidized housing | | |
| Obtained access to other housing | | |
| Total | | |

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DIRECT DOLLAR BENEFITS TO CLIENTS FROM LANDLORD / TENANT CASES

| CASE TYPE | Lump Sum / Back Benefits | Monthly Benefits |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| NOTE (1): Can list all above items separately or provide single total | | |
| Note (2): List separately the “affirmative” benefits (new or preserved benefits) and the “preventive” benefits (savings from blocking judgments). Affirmative benefits can be estimated with greater certainty than preventive benefits. | | |

SUPPORT – No Domestic Violence Involved: Cases Closed and Persons Benefiting

| CASE TYPE | # of Cases | # of Persons Directly Affected |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Obtained child support | | |
| Preserved child support | | |
| Increased child support | | |
| Obtained spousal support | | |
| Preserved spousal support | | |
| Increased spousal support | | |
| Total | | |

DIRECT DOLLAR BENEFITS TO CLIENTS FROM SUPPORT CASES (No Domestic Violence Involved)

| CASE TYPE | Lump Sum / Back Benefits | Monthly Benefits |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| NOTE (1): Can list all above items separately or provide single total | | |
| Note (2): List separately the “affirmative” benefits (new or preserved benefits) and the “preventive” benefits (savings from blocking judgments) | | |

Comments about the collection or quality of statistical information

| |
|---|
| Please provide any comments about the issues related to the methodological challenges or quality of the data provided in the statistical tables above. |
| |

Appendix B
Optional Narrative Outcomes Information for Extended Services on
Domestic Violence, Landlord-Tenant, SSI and Support Issues

Please provide significant outcomes in any of the following categories that you think complement the information provided in the statistical tables.⁹ This information need not be limited to case work, as work with partners or transactional projects can produce important benefits.

| |
|---|
| <p>Impact on individual clients. This might include “good stories” about the benefits of particular cases, information about the strengths and weaknesses of particular strategies, and other areas of concern.</p> |
| <p>Impact on clients “similarly situated.” Case work on domestic violence issues might generate changes in the ways that the police or the courts deal with domestic violence victims or perpetrators or produce community initiative to increase the capacities of shelters. Similarly, particular SSI cases might expose administrative deficiencies and led to changes in administrative practices.</p> |
| <p>Low income people generally. For example, community economic development casework might provide important qualitative benefits to neighborhoods or entire communities.</p> |
| <p>Impact on the legal and judicial system. Certain casework can make the system fairer or more responsive to unrepresented or disadvantaged persons. The benefits of this work can reach beyond legal services clients to the all population groups.</p> |

⁹ These are based on categories De Miller identified in the paper he prepared for the first Outcomes Summit. Category #4 above combines two of the categories he proposed.

Appendix C
Program Outcomes: Clients' Assessments

Please provide the following specific information. You can obtain it from some combination of the following means: (a) asking questions about these issues at the closing of extended services cases, (b) adding specific questions to existing client satisfaction questionnaires or surveys, (c) periodic surveys of a sample of clients receiving program services, (d) focus groups, or (e) other mechanisms.

| |
|--|
| <p>To what extent did our services help you? (Please check one)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A lot <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all</p> |
| <p>Please indicate if we helped increase your knowledge in the following areas. (Please check all that apply)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> your legal rights and responsibilities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> the ways that legal procedures affect you</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> useful resources in the community</p> |
| <p>Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement by checking the appropriate box.</p> <p>This agency helped me learn how to access public benefits and community resources.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> agree <input type="checkbox"/> disagree <input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree</p> |
| <p>Please indicate if we helped (check all that apply):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> make your family's situation more stable (such as by resolving custody, securing support or obtaining a divorce)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> protect you from an abuser</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> keep you in your home or get you other housing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> get you public benefits</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> in other ways (please explain):</p> |
| <p>How important to you were the results identified above? (please select one)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very important <input type="checkbox"/> somewhat important <input type="checkbox"/> not important</p> |

Appendix D
Quantitative Outcomes Measures for Advice and Brief Services on
Domestic Violence, Landlord-Tenant, SSI and Support Issues

ADVICE AND BRIEF SERVICE PROVIDED CLIENTS

| CASE TYPE | # Of Cases Closed | # Of Persons Directly Affected |
|-------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Domestic Violence | | |
| Landlord-Tenant | | |
| SSI | | |
| Support | | |
| Total | | |